

Rameshwaram island.

On 1 April 1989, at Rameshwaram near the Ramanathaswamy temple, I saw pair of white birds that looked like terns with yellow beak and long tail, soaring over the temple tower. The two much elongated, central tail feathers drew my attention immediately. I watched the birds for ten minutes through a pair of binoculars, while they were trying to land on the temple tower. Each of their three attempts was thwarted by the blue rock pigeons residing on the tower. After the failure to land they flew for some distance and again came towards the tower for landing. I therefore had sufficient time to watch the birds in flight and note the field characters. Later the birds were identified as the white tropic-bird.

The white tropic-bird differs from the closely related short-tailed tropic-bird (which also has white streamers) by the yellow bill and lack of barring on the back; the latter has a bright coral red bill and barring on the back. The other important characters noticed were the broad black band on the wing, black primary tips,

black tarsus and feet. When it was trying to land on the tower the flight was pigeon-like. The two birds were always seen together. The next day a trip was made to the same place to see the birds, but they were not noticed in the vicinity.

Though there is no authentic sight record from India, this species is frequently recorded from the Sri Lanka coast, where, according to Henry (1971), it is a fairly regular north-east monsoon visitor in small numbers. Hume (1888) in Ripley (1982) recorded this species as a straggler at Cachar in Assam. Ripley (1982) described it as a straggler in Andaman island, but it was not recorded elsewhere from India. Hence the occurrence of the bird at Rameshwaram island is noteworthy. It is interesting that, though the bird is a north-east monsoon visitor to Sri Lanka, here it occurred in summer.

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4. OCCURRENCE OF THE INDIAN SHAG *PHALACROCORAX FUSCICOLLIS* STEPHENS IN KERALA

According to Salim Ali (BIRDS OF KERALA, 1969, p. 20) the Indian shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* "possibly occurs in Kerala, as it does in Ceylon and elsewhere in peninsular India." But this species had not been authentically recorded from this area ever since.

While watching birds at Kattampally (11°55'N, 75°20'E) on 15 November 1981, I noticed a bird among a group of 14 little cormorants *Phalacrocorax niger* larger in size though similar in appearance. Closer examination showed that the bird had a dark brown bill, more slender and longer than that of the little cormorant, and black plumage which appeared scaly on the wings and back. The yellow gular skin was also observed.

This bird was identified as the Indian shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* Stephens in non-breeding plumage. In subsequent years more birds were found here. On 15 January 1989, 4 Indian shags were observed, perched on a tiny islet, among little cormorants, pintail ducks, garganey etc.

K.K. Neelakantan writes that in the Vernay Scientific Survey of the Eastern Ghats (Whistler and Kinnear, 1930-37, *JBNHS* : 34-39) it was said that the Indian shag had not been recorded south of Vedanthangal (Tamil Nadu).

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